A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL

OF THE

MAGDALEN-HOSPITAL,

ON OCCASSION OF THE

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

PRESIDENT, VICE-PRESIDENTS,

AND GOVERNORS OF THAT CHARITY;

On THURSDAY, MAY 11, 1786.

AND PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST.

BY

JOHN, Lord Bishop of OXFORD.

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M DCC LXXXVI.

At the Annual Meeting of the Governors of the Magdalen-Hoſpital, *holden at the* London Tavern, *the* 11th *Day of* May, 1786.

RESOLVED,

THAT the Thanks of this Court be returned to the Right Reverend Father in God, JOHN, Lord Biſhop of OXFORD, for his excellent Sermon preached this Day before the Preſident, Vice-Preſidents, Treaſurer, and Governors of this Charity, at the Chapel of this Hoſpital, and that he be deſired to cauſe the ſame to be printed and publiſhed.

By Order of the Court,

A. WINTERBOTTOM, *Secretary.*

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

The RIGHT HONOURABLE

FRANCIS,

EARL OF HERTFORD,

PRESIDENT;

The RIGHT HONOURABLE ROBERT, LORD ROMNEY,
The RIGHT HONOURABLE HUGH EARL OF PERCY,
The RIGHT HONOURABLE JACOB EARL OF RADNOR,
The HONOURABLE HENRY HOBART,
JOHN BARKER, ESQ.
MICHAEL JAMES, ESQ.

VICE-PRESIDENTS;

RICHARD GOODALL, Esq;

TREASURER;

To the Reſt of the GOVERNORS,

AND

SUBSCRIBERS,

TO THE

MAGDALEN-HOSPITAL,

THIS

SERMON

preached and publiſhed at their REQUEST,

IS, WITH ALL RESPECT, DEDICATED

By their moſt faithful humble Servant,

JOHN OXFORD.

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A

SERMON.

GALATIANS. Chap. VI. Ver. 1.

Brethren, if a Man be overtaken in a Fault, ye which are ſpiritual, reſtore ſuch an one in the Spirit of Meekneſs, conſidering thyſelf, leſt thou alſo be tempted.

THIS admonition was delivered by an Apoſtle of JESUS CHRIST, who came into the World to ſave Sinners. It is authorized by his divine Example, and ſupported by its own Reaſonableneſs. We are exhorted to look into ourſelves, when we ſee a Fellow-Chriſtian fall, and to aſſiſt him meekly, in his recovery from Guilt and Diſgrace.

The

The Apoſtle had recommended this elſewhere, in the particular caſe of a Perſon, who had given Offence to the Corinthian Church by a groſs immorality. He enjoins the Reſtoration of that Perſon, upon his profeſſion of Repentance. In my Text, his benevolent Mind extends the Precept to the whole compaſs of Sins and Frailties, and ſo doubtleſs includes ſuch, as bring a Miſery upon the Sinners too great to be born, reducing them to Solitude and Want, after having diminiſhed their hopes of the Favor of God, and expoſed them to the deſertion and contempt of Mankind.

The Goſpel having opened Heaven to All that truly repent, however great or infamous their Sins may have been, the Pen of our Apoſtle was manifeſtly guided by this evangelical Spirit, when he calls upon ſuch Chriſtians, as are themſelves without Reproach, to become the inſtruments of a merciful God, in reſtoring a Sinner, in the Spirit of Meekneſs.

I propoſe, after having conſidered this Precept, to apply it to the ſubject of our preſent Aſſembly; but firſt let us briefly obſerve the Doctrine and the Practice of our Saviour himſelf, with reſpect to Penitent Sinners.

That they were acceptable to God before the Goſpel Revelation, appears from many Paſſages, and ſome Examples, in the Old Teſtament; but his Favor not being then promiſed beyond the preſent Life, we muſt look into the Goſpel for the full extent of the Doctrine of a Sinner's Acceptance with God.

God. There our Lord expreſsly ſays himſelf, that *God gave him*, and *ſent him into the World, that the World through Him might be ſaved*; that is, as He explains it, might have EVERLASTING LIFE. Faith and Repentance are the Terms preſcribed to All men, Sinners not excepted, upon which Salvation is promiſed through CHRIST JESUS, as the Mediator and Redeemer.

Repentance, which preſuppoſes Faith, is ſtated, as ſo very acceptable to God, that in three Parables, recited ſucceſſively by St. LUKE, it is repreſented by our Lord as matter of Joy in Heaven, in the caſe of only one Sinner that repenteth. The Man, who had loſt one Sheep out of an hundred; and the Woman, who had loſt one piece of Silver out of ten, are repreſented as anxious to recover their Loſs, and happy in recovering it, notwithſtanding it was ſo ſmall a proportion of their Property.

The Father of an ungrateful and diſolute Son, who went roving from Home, in queſt of Pleaſure and Ruin, was tranſported with joy at his Return, when, having finiſhed his Courſe of Folly and Guilt, he came to humble himſelf before God and his offended Parent, with a penitent Heart. The Father had another and a better Son to comfort him, but he was ſo tranſported with joy on the preſent occaſion, that the Son, who appeared to deſerve much more, than was now done for the returning Prodigal, was deeply affected, and expreſſed himſelf mortified. But he was anſwered, moſt affectionately towards both, by his happy Parent, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is "thine; it was meet that we ſhould make merry and be glad

"for

" for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again, was loſt " and is found."

We have here a clear and ſatisfactory view of the Doctrine, revealed in the Goſpel, of a repenting Sinner's Acceptance with God. The ſame God, who will reward the good in a future ſtate, will in that ſtate be merciful to thoſe, who turn to Him, with heart and mind, notwithſtanding their having rebelled againſt him, and not obeyed his Voice, to walk in his Laws, which he had ſet before them.

Let us next conſider this Divine Teacher's Practice. The Evangeliſts report it to have been his cuſtom to ſpend part of his time with Publicans and Sinners, and even to admit them to the familiarity of eating with him, that he might the more ſucceſsfully inſinuate his important truths into their minds. When he was blamed for this by perſons, who were righteous overmuch, inſtead of diſavowing or excuſing it, he told them, it was the very purpoſe of his coming into the world, to ſave Sinners, whom he deſcribes as perſons loſt, wandering from their deſtination, and abandoned by other men, though welcome to a Refuge in him. He expreſsly invites thoſe, who are incumbered with the weight of their guilt, to have recourſe to Him for Reſt; and leſt any ſhould be awed by the ſublime Purity of his Character, he obviates their diffidence, by adding, " for I am meek and lowly in heart."

He was once invited to the houſe of a Phariſee, where a woman, who was or had been a Sinner, ventured to approach his

his Perſon, and honour him in a way, which ſhe thought moſt reſpectful, weeping at the ſame time, and humbling herſelf, with the moſt ſignificant marks of real Penitence. The diſſembling Phariſee was, as St. Luke relates, attentive to the conduct of his divine Gueſt, being curious to ſee, whether he was Prophet enough to diſcern, who this Woman was; but when he proceeded to object her former conduct to her preſent ſtate of mind, our Lord took up her cauſe in a manner, which expoſed his Vanity and Hypocriſy, and ſpoke peace to her ſoul.

He was thus uniform, in directing his doctrine and practice to the great Object, of inviting, inculcating, and encouraging Repentance. So that the Precept before us is abundantly authorized by Him, from whom we derive our Religion, and upon whom we reſt our hopes of Salvation. It breathes the Spirit of the Goſpel, in recommending the moſt ſalutary exerciſe of Chriſtian Humility and Charity.

We ſhall obſerve this more cloſely, by attending to the words of the Apoſtle's admonition. It ſuppoſes, that perſons, even of unblemiſhed Characters, ſpiritual Perſons, as they are here deſcribed, may want to be reminded of an obvious branch of Chriſtian duty, " that of reſtoring one, who is overtaken in a fault, and, reſtoring him in the Spirit of Meekneſs. The conſideration, inforcing this, is evidently addreſſed to ſuperior Virtue, " conſidering thyſelf, leſt thou alſo be " tempted."

Chriſtian

Chriſtian Religion, in its ſimple ſtate, abſtracted from the prejudices, which grow upon us in our intercourſe with the world, would inſpire us with pure univerſal Benevolence, Sympathy, and Affection. That ſingle Eye, which our Lord tells us gives Light to the whole man, is ſo intent upon his duty, that nothing will divert him from it. No meanneſs of the object, no aggravating circumſtance of the Sins that depreſs an unhappy mind, would obſtruct the exertion of Chriſtian Benevolence, flowing from Chriſtian Simplicity.

It is written, that we are bound to relieve as many of the real wants of our fellow-creatures, as we can; to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirſty, to clothe the naked, to viſit the ſick, to comfort the priſoner, and to aſſiſt the penitent ſinner in recovering the favor of God and the eſteem of mankind. All this a true diſciple of Chriſt will do, as far as poſſible. Whether it be convenient to himſelf, or not; whether it be reputable or not, he will, in the ſingleneſs of his heart compaſſionate and relieve the wants of the object. If this object be a Sinner, and an unhappy ſuffering ſinner, he may not therefore be a Sinner above all others, becauſe he ſuffereth ſuch things; and who ſhall judge the degree of his guilt? Chriſtian Simplicity will anſwer, Not the perſon, who feels it his duty to relieve him.

Thus we ſhould all reaſon, if we had only the Goſpel in our thoughts. But we experience by living in the world, that ſome ſins are, perhaps for good reaſons, more diſgraceful than others; and want is, without any good reaſon, looked upon with ſo con-

contemptuous an eye, that it becomes an aggravation, when reſulting from an irreputable Sin.

The corrupt part of our nature not only prompts us to evil, but is vigilant and active to prevent the little good we do. Hence the apprehenſions, ariſing ſometimes in minds rather charitable, that they may diſcredit themſelves, by appearing to countenance certain Sinners, though it be for the purpoſe of reſtoring them.

It is a WORLDLY PRUDENCE, too flattering and commodious to be reſiſted, unleſs a ſenſe of duty happens to be ſtrong enough to overpower the ſuggeſtion. But if it be, there is a worſe enemy at hand, SPIRITUAL PRIDE, which may lead well diſpoſed men to forget themſelves, and treat a ſinner, though penitent, with a diſtance or harſhneſs, which their own condition will not juſtify, and by which his will not be relieved.

I am unwilling to compare ſuch men, with a certain Phariſee in the Goſpel, becauſe this ſort of ſpiritual pride may exiſt without Hypocriſy. But it is obſervable, that, when the Phariſee boaſted of the good things he had done, in his prayer in the temple, he might in thoſe inſtances ſpeak truth; and that the deſpiſed Publican, who valued himſelf upon nothing, might have no merit to alledge, for he only confeſſed with humility, that he was a ſinner, and implored mercy; yet the Saviour and Judge of the world, who relates the Parable "unto certain, which truſted in themſelves, that they were

"righteous

" righteous, and deſpiſed others;" concludes it with deciding in favour of the humble, repenting Publican.

St. Paul ſeems to have foreſeen, that ſpiritual pride would be in motion, as ſoon as Chriſtians were influenced in their religious conduct by the opinion of the world; and therefore the duty we are conſidering appears to have been laid down by him in the cleareſt, moſt inevaſible terms, as particularly incumbent upon the beſt Profeſſors of our Religion, they being beſt qualified for it. The purer they are themſelves, the leſs they have to fear from the condeſcenſion; the more they are in earneſt, the more zealouſly they will undertake and execute a work, which cannot be begun without a pious degree of Benevolence, nor be accompliſhed without a patient perſeverance.

The Spirit of Meekneſs, here recommended, is not only in itſelf a ſpirit well ſuited to the perſons and the occaſion, ſince even the beſt of us are alſo liable to be tempted; but it correſponds with the Act of Reſtoring, in our Apoſtle's ſenſe of the word. He ſuppoſes the Man overtaken in a fault, to be a member of the Chriſtian Church, ſeparated from it for a time by his fault. He ſeems to compare him to a diſlocated Member of the human body, and the advice before us might be rendered, according to the original word, REPLACE, or REINSTATE him; and as a natural fellow-feeling will incline the hand, that performs this good office in the one caſe, to give the patient no unneceſſary pain; ſo in the other, a conſciouſneſs of being compoſed of the ſame original materials, with the

the offending Sinner, will induce the ſpiritual man to bring him back to the Society of Chriſtians, in the Spirit of MEEKNESS, without that mortifying Severity, which might harden him, and with that gentle attention, which even a ſtubborn offender can ſeldom reſiſt.

What hath been hitherto ſaid leads ſo directly to the ſpecies of Charity now under conſideration, that it ſeems ſuperfluous to add much by way of application. Indeed this Hoſpital is an excellent practical Comment upon St. Paul's advice, and the conduct of it, as the ſame appears from the annual Reports, furniſhes rather matter for Applauſe, than for further admonition.

The perſons admitted are PENITENT SINNERS, weary of a diſſolute life, ſuffering Shame, Remorſe, Want, Deſertion of every ſuccour from man, and a melancholy Deſpondency of the favor of God.

In this miſerable condition, they apply to the only Houſe of Mercy left open for them, and without any other recommendation than their Diſtreſs, are admitted, comforted, ſupported, reformed, rendered uſeful to the community, of which they had been a Nuiſance, and happy in themſelves, having exchanged their bad habits for good ones, having learnt the value of domeſtic life, of Sobriety, Induſtry, and Decency; having learnt to adore the Goodneſs of God, diſplayed in their recovery from Guilt, and from all its retinue of Diſtreſſes, to love and praiſe him in their Lives, as well as with their Lips; and to be in Charity with all the world, of which they had before ſeen

only the worſe part, and of which the better part have, without any other motive than the Glory of God, and the impulſe of the nobleſt humanity and public ſpirit, that is to ſay, of Chriſtian Charity, communicated to them the means of every real good in this life, and the way to eternal Happineſs in the next.

What a glorious employment of Money, Time, and Thought, thus to diminiſh the quantity of Evil, and ſo conſiderably increaſe the quantity of Good in the world! to reſcue, from the Devil and all his works, the hearts and minds of Perſons, who had been led away captive, and are now become free, to ſerve their God, and promote his Cauſe, as far as their ſphere of action ſhall extend.

All this is no exaggeration of the praiſes due to the Founders, Protectors, and Supporters of this ſublime Charity. We have evidences of its merits in the annual accounts, by which it appears, that the Sums contributed, and the valuable contribution of a ſuperintending Care over the Progreſs of this arduous work, have been providentially rewarded with a very high degree of Succeſs.

It appears, that of the Women admitted from the beginning of the inſtitution, about two thirds have been completely reformed, reſtored to the world, and ſent out into ſuch uſeful employments, as make their Reformation a benefit to their Country, as well as a Bleſſing to themſelves.

This authentic and comfortable aſſurance, that your Labour has not been in vain, will attract the notice of all who have obſerved,

obſerved, how difficult it is, in moſt caſes, to give a new direction to the human mind, after it has been for ſome time bent upon a vicious courſe, and ſhut againſt every acceſs from good Advice or Example.

Experiments are frequently made in private life, to reclaim a diſſolute Character, rendered ſo by youth and health under the influence of bad example. But the friendly office is apt to be coldly received, whilſt Vice has its nouriſhment from Health and Plenty. Religious and moral leſſons are inſipid, or perhaps nauſeous, to a mind occupied by falſe notions of pleaſure and happineſs. Some men ingenuouſly confeſs, that they cannot conquer evil appetites and habits, even in their own breaſts, where their power ſhould be abſolute; they fail in ſtrength, or in perſeverance, and relapſe into folly or guilt.

But though the converſion of an habitual ſinner in general, before he is driven by want and other diſtreſſes, to commune with his own heart, and conſider his ways, be ſo very difficult and unpromiſing a taſk; it is, God be praiſed, not deſperate in the caſe of theſe women.

Without pretending to a Miracle, we may be allowed to exult in a ſucceſs, greater than the friends of this deſign expected, or the enemies of it conceived poſſible. It is accountable from the nature and conduct of this inſtitution; from the immediate change of the ſcene; the abſence of all opportunities and deluſions of Sin; the tranſition to a peaceable, ſober, and regular diviſion of time; and, above all, the enjoyment of religious thoughts and exerciſes.

It

It is indeed a piece of juſtice due to the Women, who have received benefit here, to acknowledge, that they themſelves contributed to their own converſion; and whether they were brought hither by want, or impelled by a reſtleſs conſcience, it would be ungenerous to inquire.

Their very approach to this houſe argues ſome change of mind, ſome confeſſion, that the ways of Sin are neither ways of pleaſantneſs nor of Peace; and the foundation for Repentance having been laid by themſelves, in a ſincere ſorrow for their ſins, they have ſurely a fair claim to ſome ſhare in the merits of this inſtitution, as it could be of uſe only to thoſe, who voluntarily embraced the benefits of it, and aſſiſted in carrying them to effect.

May they continue to glorify God, and celebrate the humanity of their Benefactors, by perſevering in their preſent courſe of life!

May others, who ſhall, like them, unhappily fall into Sin, by Seduction, or by that want of Principle, which too much diſtinguiſhes the lower part of the Inhabitants of large Cities, follow the good Examples of Repentance before them here; accept the invitation they have to this Houſe; and hearken to that more preſſing Call they have in the Goſpel to Holineſs and Virtue, to the Comforts of Religion in this life, and to the eternal happineſs prepared for Penitent Sinners hereafter!

FINIS.

BRITISH MUSEUM